



Security Council

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LETTER DATED 8 MARCH 1999 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE
OF ETHIOPIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS ADDRESSED TO THE PRESIDENT
OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 6 March 1999
addressed to you from Mr. Meles Zenawi, Prime Minister of the Federal Democratic
Republic of Ethiopia (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex
circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Duri MOHAMMED
Ambassador
Permanent Representative



Annex

Letter dated 6 March 1999 from the Prime Minister of Ethiopia
addressed to the President of the Security Council

I decided to write to you to convey to you, and through you to the Security Council, the sadness and the deeply felt frustration that I myself, and our entire people, have felt at the treatment of our country, a victim of aggression, has received from the Security Council over the past few months.

Let me, Mr. President, set the record straight from the outset. There is hardly anyone who can deny that aggression was committed against Ethiopia by Eritrea. The Organization of African Unity (OAU) Framework Agreement, which was crafted after six months of intensive labour, was premised on the finding that Eritrea was the aggressor and Ethiopia the victim of aggression.

It was this same Framework Agreement that was endorsed by the Security Council as "fair and balanced" and the "the best hope" for peace. As such, at the minimum, the Council had implicitly recognized and tacitly accepted that Ethiopia was the victim of aggression.

While the facts were thus clear to the Security Council, it did not, as it had done previously in comparable instances, condemn the Eritrean aggression and it chose not ask Eritrea to withdraw from occupied Ethiopian territory. This double standard was palpably felt by us, but we continued to show full cooperation with the Security Council, inter alia, out of conviction that the role of the United Nations is critical for peace and stability, including in our subregion.

In the meantime, the Eritrean authorities were being emboldened to persist in their intransigence, including by the Security Council's lukewarm response to the challenge posed by the Eritrean aggression. We, for our part, continued for almost nine months to plead for the assistance of the Security Council and its members to ensure the withdrawal of the Eritrean occupying forces from our territory. Nine months of supplication on our part for salvation from a full-scale war were in vain. After this long period of Eritrean obstinacy, intransigence and provocation, intended to humiliate Ethiopia, we had no other alternative but to exercise our right of self-defence - a right provided for in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations and sanctioned by international law.

It then became obvious to us that the Security Council was determined to prevent the victim of aggression from regaining its dignity as a nation. Thus, instead of putting, even belatedly, the required pressure on the aggressor, the Council opted for a course of action which essentially put both the aggressor and the victim of aggression on the same footing. More telling in this regard, and the instance which will always remain a stain on the history of the Council's involvement in this crisis, is what the Council wanted to do at its informal consultation on 24 February 1999. It was clear to Ethiopia that what was critical for the Security Council was not coming to the assistance of the victim but finding ways and means of appeasing the aggressor through concessions

that would have had the effect of undermining Ethiopia's administration in the occupied territories. Fortunately for Ethiopia, only two days after those serious consultations on how to reward the aggressor at the expense of the victim were conducted by the Council, Ethiopia, at great sacrifice, liberated the Badme area from Eritrean occupation. This turn of events also served to protect the OAU Framework Agreement, which was slated to be compromised to accommodate the wishes of the aggressor country in compliance with its insistence that might must create right.

Now, I wish to come to the convoluted letter written on 27 February 1999 by the President of Eritrea to your predecessor, in which Eritrea's acceptance of the OAU framework agreement was thrown in as an afterthought - a letter which was written as the Eritrean occupying forces were being driven out from a portion of Ethiopian territory they had occupied by force for nine months and from which the Eritrean President had said he would never ever withdraw, affirming that such withdrawal would be as unlikely as the sun failing to rise.

The Framework Agreement, which only six days previously the Eritrean President had told an European Union Troika was unsatisfactory, became, by some miracle, acceptable to Eritrea. Its author, OAU, which the Eritrean President told the Troika was a fickle organization, suddenly became credible in the eyes of the Eritrean authorities.

No wisdom is required, Mr. President, to realize that the Eritrean acceptance of the Framework Agreement is a tactical ploy which they decided to resort to after they saw what was coming, and a tactical move to buy time.

This, Mr. President, is corroborated by an abundance of evidence. Even as the Security Council was being informed about this sudden change of heart in Asmara, the Eritrean authorities were making it clear to their public that their alleged withdrawal was tactical, intended for the reorganization of their occupying forces for another offensive. This has continued to be repeated by various officials of Eritrea, including their Minister for Foreign Affairs.

The Eritrean public has yet to be formally informed by its own Government that Eritrea has accepted the OAU Framework Agreement. What the Eritrean public knows about is the military preparations, which comes closer to the truth with regard to the Eritrean intentions than what the Security Council is told by the Eritrean President.

It is true that the Eritrean occupying forces have, with great sacrifice, been driven out of Badme. But large chunks of Ethiopian territory in the Zalambessa-Aiga, Bada-Bure and Egala regions still remain under Eritrean occupation. What the Eritrean intentions are in these occupied areas is made crystal clear by the frantic efforts being made to build and reinforce fortifications.

All this can hardly be surprising or unknown to the Security Council. It is therefore perplexing to us that the Security Council would allow itself to be railroaded into taking the Eritrean position at face value. In effect, what the Security Council has been persuaded to do is to give to the aggressor time for preparation so that we may go back to the conditions that helped frame the

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discussion that took place at the Council's informal consultation on 24 February 1999.

The Security Council, Mr. President, is being misled by those who are influential and by those who, wittingly or unwittingly, have decided to make their policy on this crisis an appendage of the insincere and deceptive position of the Eritrean authorities. It is indeed tragic and an extreme form of injustice for the Council, which failed to utter a word in condemnation of an aggression committed against Ethiopia, now to want, with unprecedented enthusiasm, to stop Ethiopia from exercising its right of self-defence against an aggressor that has shown no inclination to respect international law and that has made it crystal clear that it is only might for which it has respect.

In this context, the regret expressed by the Security Council in its latest statement about Ethiopia's exercise of its right of self-defence is a reflection of this lack of balance in the stance that continues to be adopted by the Council on this crisis. In so doing, the Security Council, in particular those at whose behest the Council is being derailed from the path of justice, is repeating the infamous League of Nations policy of appeasement of the 1930s, which made Ethiopia a sacrificial lamb on the altar of the political and strategic calculations of the major Powers.

Despite all this and in spite of the disheartening experience we have had, as a victim of aggression, with the Security Council, I, for one, am still hopeful that justice and fairness will prevail in the deliberations of the Security Council on this and other similar issues. Accordingly, we look forward to the Security Council playing a constructive role for peace and stability in the Horn of Africa - a region which, in addition to the already existing intractable crises bedevilling the area, has been made to face a new phenomenon of militaristic adventure by Eritrea. Ethiopia needs, and the Horn of Africa requires, the Security Council to discharge its responsibilities without delay and without equivocation on the Eritrean aggression so that the clear message could be conveyed that, notwithstanding the Eritrean President's insistence to the contrary, might does not make right and that we live, not by the rules of the jungle, but by rules of civilized behaviour.

I, therefore, ask the Security Council and plead with it in the name of its own Charter principles:

1. To condemn the Eritrean aggression against Ethiopia;
2. To call on the Eritrean occupying forces to withdraw immediately and unconditionally from all remaining occupied Ethiopian territories;
3. To affirm what is clear and obvious, that Eritrea bears full responsibility for the loss of lives, for the humanitarian crisis and for the destruction of property caused by its aggression.

In conclusion, let me assure you, Mr. President, that while Ethiopia reserves its right of self-defence in conformity with what is provided for in the Charter of the United Nations and in international law - rights which the Security Council cannot deny it - it will, on the other hand, continue its commitment to the OAU Framework Agreement and to continuing cooperation with OAU. As a law-abiding nation, Ethiopia has no other agenda in this crisis other than self-defence and the protection and the defence of its territorial integrity and sovereignty.

(Signed) Meles ZENAWI
Prime Minister of the
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
